

For the Sentinel:  
Pizarro on the Island of Gallo

BY HENRY ARTHUR MORRISON

From a lonely desert lake,  
Where faded the wild Pacific waves,  
Where blinding storms spent their rage,  
And lightning lurked on the cave,  
The thunder's voice had echoed in  
Those silent hours of storm and rain,  
Whose hearts were chilled in despair—  
But not was his who guided them.

For weeks they'd tried the lonely lake,  
Drenched by the rain, by lightning spent,  
By wailing winds, by wailing rain,  
And thundered there, by discontent,  
Was this to be the end of all?  
Their dreams of conquest and Peru!  
Their wealth untouched, should they be rot?  
—Not so, swore he, his stern and true,  
Francisco Pizarro!

But through the dash of blinding rain,  
And roar of breakers, foaming high,  
One day a wailing voice was heard:  
"I can see you!"  
At the island's foot they lay,  
From those dark hours of storm and rain,  
And sudden eyes grew bright again,  
Though misty rain to tears were there.

They thought those faint, suffering men,  
And, as they spoke, the rain fell fast,  
And, as they spoke, the rain fell fast,  
If they would turn from what seemed death,  
Oh! those cool, wailing, shaly groves,  
And sudden eyes grew bright again,  
At that, they turn from what's before,  
What brighter look the loved spot wears!

But now their Captain steps apart,  
With his true sword he cuts the air,  
In line across, from east to west,  
Then sternly speaks to the band,  
"Here to the north is Pizarro's  
His pleasure, poverty, and ease,  
And here the south—Pizarro, his  
Its riches, death—choose which you please.

"I to the South!" and, as he spoke,  
He boldly stepped across the line,  
Twelve brave Castilians followed him,  
Whose hearts were with Pizarro's mine;  
He crossed that line to win a name,  
That flaming sea of human blood  
Shall, through the ages of all time,  
Feel that in him the conqueror stood,  
Francisco Pizarro!

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son, M. Appert, and the writer of these lines. Sanson lived in one of the suburbs of Paris. We went to it along the Canal de l'Ourcq. We reached a very pretty cottage standing alone in a garden kept in high order, full of flowers. The house and windows were painted in gay colors, principally of a bright green and we were introduced into a well-furnished, nicely adorned apartment, when the host came to welcome us. He told us that his emoluments, once large, had, from the diminished number of capital punishments, been much reduced, and though he had de quiescere, where would he live, his *maison* was very different now from what it had been in other—better—days. This may have been an apology for our finding no repeat prepared in return for M. Appert's hospitality. He repeated to us that the office had been for generations hereditary in his race. Marriages had been generally confined to families connected with the same profession, of which there were several in the province.

"Sanson gave many particulars of what had happened on memorable occasions between the moment when he had received the *condemnation* from the police authorities and that in which the task was completed by him as *exécuteur des hautes œuvres*. He stated—and we had afterwards an opportunity of verifying the fact—that the *procédure* of every public execution were kept with the utmost accuracy. He asserted that he had never been otherwise in the worst time of the French revolution; which most assuredly would prove that the number of sufferers, as ordinarily reported and believed, must have been enormously exaggerated. Possibly all such statistics should be received with much distrust, but in reaching any authentic source of information one is always impressed with the conviction that political passion on all sides leads to enormous misrepresentation, and reported as they are under the influence of vehement excitement, the records of contemporary annals should be received with much distrust. He repeated again and again that the amount of physical suffering from the fall of the axe and the separation of the head from the body was exceedingly small—the death was instantaneous—in the whole of his experience he had never seen an involuntary motion of the muscles or decomposition—that the stories of a platform below, just above there was a plank, with a round hole for the reception of the head, at the base of which was an opening through which the axe was to pass in severing the head from the body. The plank moved backwards and forwards in a groove; it was raised by an axle at the two sides perpendicularly. In an instant the sufferer was attached to it by cords; it was then thrown down flat, and moved forward, and the head, at the same moment the cord was pulled, the heavy axe fell down through the iron frame, and a basket was sent to receive the head of the victim almost as soon as the click was heard announcing as it was the first time Sanson had ever seen the man who had furnished him with so much food for the gallows; and it gave Vidoque the opportunity of making many inquiries as to the department of illustrious victims in the moment supreme of violence."

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"Sanson, the father, was a man of huge size—in stature more than six feet—of a placid and serious expression of countenance. He might have passed for a country gentleman, at ease in his possession. I could have pointed out a 'turtledove' Alteman or two to whom he bore a resemblance. He answered every question with the greatest serenity and gravity. He called the instruments of death 'engines,' and in my intercourse with him I never heard the word 'gallows,' or 'knife' fall from his lips. He was disposed to be taciturn, but less so than his son, who appeared to look upon his work with a considerable degree of reverence, and took no part in the conversation except when especially addressed. The son was a man of ordinary appearance, of the common height, and of a salubrious look. No one would have noticed him in a crowd. Vidoque was a short, vivacious, vain and talkative. He seemed to consider the interest he excited as the recognition of a claim which everybody must allow. He liked to be the narrator of his own grand deeds, and which he was ostentatiously proud; and on the stage where he played his part—whether tragic or comic—he would always be the principal actor."

"Many of the tales which Vidoque related may be found in the memoirs which he afterwards published, but no printed narrative could convey an idea of the hilarity—the enthusiasm—I might say the eloquence with which he spoke of some of his successful feats. 'Do you remember the great burglary at the Daigolles? That was a scheme of murder and robbery on a grand scale. It was soon after I joined the public service—long before it was known that I had anything to do with the authorities. But I was a party consulted as to all the preparations for breaking into the house, for securing the property, and for disposing any person who should resist. It was determined, *enfin*, that the work should be done. The spoil was considerable; and I was named the leader of the expedition. We were all well armed; the arrangements were directed by me, and they were perfect. But I had settled with the police that a certain number of them should be planted in a neighboring house, and that they were to rush forward and capture us all when I fired a pistol from a window that was pointed out. *L'opération fut faite*, and I was as quiet as the rest in gathering up the spoils. I made my way to the room from whence it had been agreed the pistol should be fired. The police rushed to the doors at the signal, and the whole gang was captured. I named the number. Not one of them had the slightest idea that I had been a party to their betrayal; but murder had been committed before the arrest took place, and two of the robbers were ordered for execution. I saw them on the scaffold, and the execution, as the act was conveying them to execution. They recognized me in the crowd. I fancied I saw on their faces the knowledge that I had *fait leur affaire*; but my depositions were not necessary to their conviction. I saw M. Sanson, do you recollect the circumstance? How did they die? Sanson—They died cursing their betrayers."

"Vidoque gave us an account of the manner in which, while in jail, he carried on the courtship with his wife. She was a felon like himself, and inhabited a separate and remote prison. Much correspondence passed between them by the collusion and co-operation of keepers and convicts, who fancied they owed a sort of loyalty to so distinguished a member of the profession. Each had been well acquainted with the other while carrying on their schemes of fraud, and each came to the conclusion that it would be wiser and better to be the helpers and the instruments rather than the foes and the victims of the law. When both were released and the appeals celebrated, it was their amusement to recount to each other their hairbreadth escapes, and their adventures, and to moralize on the sweetness of adversity. Vidoque talked of the heroic character of his fiancée, and of the risks she had run and the dangers she had encountered. *Quand l'interdiction des amours*. But he pronounced her a most faithful and a most useful wife; and when Vidoque established himself in Paris as a discoverer and restorer of lost and stolen property—a profession he exercised on a large scale—he was in communication with the police had terminated—his wife became to him a valuable auxiliary. They were both well acquainted with the mysterious hierarchy of crime."

"There was no criminal under sentence of death; only, Sanson said, as you gentlemen are interested in such proceedings, you shall, if you like, have an opportunity of seeing all the details. I will have an homme de paille got ready, and if you do me the honor of waiting on at my domicile, where the *mezzanine* is kept, I will have my assistants ready, and everything shall be done that may be done at the Place de Greve, so that you may have the means of seeing how efficiently the work is effected. Such an invitation was not to be rejected—to witness a bloodless execution performed by so distinguished a functionary. Our party consisted of the late Earl of Durham, Mr. Edward Ellice, Mr. Daw-

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